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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Saturday, June 19, 1937.

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Listeners, if you like cantaloup, you will be interested in this week's letter from the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D. C. which starts out with news of a new cantaloup developed by the plant scientists.

Writes our correspondent: "California cantaloup growers are literally 'going to town' this year with a new cantaloup developed by plant scientists of the Department of Agriculture and the California Experiment Station. The new cantaloup is called 'Number 45'--apparently to be a lucky number for cantaloup growers. Its great virtue is that it is resistant to that destructive fungus disease known as 'powdery mildew.' For more than a dozen years now farmers of the Imperial Valley of California who produce more than half the country's cantaloup crop have been battling this disease.

"When chemical preparations to check the fungus failed to save the cantaloups, the scientists set out to breed new varieties which the mildew would not attack, yet which would have other desirable qualities such as fine flavor and endurance for shipping.

"The first step in this plant-breeding job was to cross a cantaloup from India, which was resistant to mildew but of no commercial value, with Hale Best, a desirable California variety. Then, back-crossing on Hale Best, followed by several generations of selective breeding, resulted in a cantaloup variety known as 'Number 50.' Number 50 was satisfactory except in shipping quality. Four more generations of selective breeding produced 'Number 45.' Last year about half the acreage of the Imperial Valley was planted to Number 45 and this year even more land is given to it. Most of the other local acreage is planted to varieties that are mildew-resistant but not so desirable in other ways as Number 45.

"Perhaps you would like to have a description of Number 45. The plant men say it is much like Hale Best but superior in taste and shipping qualities. It matures a little later. It is slightly oblong and uniform in shape and size. Its seed-cavity is small and holds firm even when shipped long distances. The flesh is firm and sweet, of a salmon or orange color--slightly lighter in color than most commercial varieties of cantaloup.

"Because of its superior shipping qualities, Number 45 will still ship well if it matures on the vine, which gives it a distinct advantage over other varieties which must be picked before they are mature. The disadvantage of the new variety is that the early cantaloups are somewhat small for commercial shipment while the last of the crop is rather large.

"While I am writing about new varieties, I want to tell you about a new sweetclover which is causing quite a stir among Department plant men who are interested in forage crops. Some years ago two of the Department's plant explorers who were in China found a new variety of sweetclover. They shipped a specimen of it back to Washington. Later they found other similar sweetclovers in central Europe, Russia and Mongolia and sent back 27 specimens, all told. The new clovers, the plant men say, are 'really sweet,' because they do not contain the bitter substance called coumarin (pronounced Koo-mar-an) which is found in all the common yellow blooming or white blooming sweetclovers in the United States. This bitter coumarin in clover is believed to poison livestock when they eat improperly cured clover hay. Tests made at the Wisconsin Experiment Station have shown that livestock prefer the new sweet sweetclover to the common varieties of clover. And rabbits and calves which have eaten spoiled hay made from the new clover have not shown any evidence of illness as a result.

"The new clover is shorter than American varieties and produces fewer leaves. Department men have been trying to cross it with domestic varieties that are better producers. So far they have not made much headway because its blooms are self-fertile. If the cross cannot be made, they hope to find a domestic sweetclover with a low coumarin content.

"Sweetclover is one of the plants which has risen in the estimation of farmers and plant scientists in recent years. Only a few years ago sweetclover was considered a noxious weed. Now it is in high favor for pasture and soil improvement. In many areas of the Soil Conservation Service, sweetclover has been introduced successfully for the first time in the last year or two.

"Speaking of weeds, you may be interested to know that the Bureau of Public Roads has announced that weed destruction is to be part of a permanent roadside-improvement program. Beside being unsightly, weeds along the roadside may hide highway warning signs, shorten the vision of the driver, and hinder drainage. Moreover, seeds from these roadside weeds are carried to nearby fields by wind and water and birds. Then, too, passing automobiles carry seed to distant points to infest new areas. Mowing, hand cutting, use of chemicals and even burning are the various present means of destroying roadside weeds. 'Whichever method you use, make a thorough job of it,' advise the roads men, because small patches of undamaged weeds may reseed large areas and offset work done."

That concludes the news this week from the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D. C.